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Dear Permission to be Powerful Reader,

Growing up, I was bombarded with the message that I was supposed to do what I was told...

Bow to authority.

From watching my mother stay in a relationship long past its expiration date.

From watching her complain endlessly about him without seemingly doing anything about it.

From living in a home with a tyrannical father. That oppressive energy left its mark.

I never received the required love and validation to become a healthy adult. Bad role models surrounded me. There are so many reasons I could explain how I became this way. I could spend all day just itemizing all of that.

Long story short, I was raised to become a doormat.

I Call This Version of Myself The Chauffeur

This was because I was reduced to becoming my ex-wife's chauffeur for many years. I had to become very used to a certain kind of oppression to feel at home in it for so many years.

It's so funny. After I broke up with her, my ex acted like she tried to salvage our relationship. That's certainly not what I saw. I saw a person with an addiction who felt threatened that someone was going to take away her favorite drug — control. My ex could not function without a truly extreme amount of control over the people around her.

There were reasons why I went along with it. Trying to peel back all of the layers to explain my dysfunctional relationship is complex. The whole dynamic was so absurd. And my ex-wife refused to respect my version of reality, so there wasn't much I could do about her.

For my whole life, I have always had low self-esteem. I see it so much more clearly now. I was so comfortable playing the supporting role. I was so

comfortable giving and giving. And so uncomfortable receiving.

Being the chauffeur was a massive insight that I gained in therapy. It truly changed the game. Once I saw it, I couldn't unsee it. I looked at my entire life through this chauffeur lens. There was chauffeuring in everything in my life.

I took on a career as a freelance copywriter. It's taken me many years to feel deserving of a decent income. You're willing to work for peanuts and false promises when you believe you're nothing. My entire business model hinged on me playing a supporting role for other people's businesses. And, in that dynamic, the client was like God. They had all the power. All the control.

In the early days, I jumped through so many hoops for my clients that it was ridiculous. I could spend hours painting this dynamic. I'm thinking about one 3 a.m. call I once had with Neil Patel. Yikes. Indeed, I was willing to compromise my values for a buck at a moment's notice.

Why on earth would somebody even ask for a call at that hour? More importantly, why would I agree?

I Grew Up in an Unfair Household

My father controlled us like puppets, and there were severe consequences for stepping out of line. Meanwhile, he got away with murder.

Remarkably, the brain can be attracted to the familiar. Never forget that. Let's say you grew up in a loveless environment. In a place where people invalidated your feelings constantly...

Twenty-five years later, I'm still turning my nose up at anybody who likes me, but the person who doesn't like me—the emotionally unavailable one. The ones who won't give me their approval — they're the ones I want.

I don't even realize that those are the people I'm obsessing over. But I'm blind to all of the secure, healthy people. They're not even on my radar.

I think about the girl I dated most recently and a new love interest I have. I wonder what kind of man I must be to attract these healthy, beautiful, successful women... That person is so far from the person I've been all my life. I have been repelled by people with those healthy traits all these years.

It's wild.

Sometimes, I think... I can't believe I've pursued women's approval my whole life. Like... I told this girl I have a "friends first" dating policy. And her eyes lit up. I'd never put up a boundary like that. Not ever?

I've always wanted to pursue intimacy as fast as possible. There was no stopping to evaluate. There was no selectivity whatsoever. Even wondering if someone else likes you is a bridge too far. It's backward. It's always about how you feel about them.

NEVER let a person define you

Never let them say they know what you're thinking or feeling. Run. Nobody has the right to represent you. This is a significant boundary violation, and it's also catastrophic for your mental health and well-being.

I'm re-reading *Controlling People* by Patricia Evans right now. And, funny enough, this isn't the first issue I would think to discuss when talking about a controlling person... But for the expert, this is it.

This is the defining trait of all controlling people. Defining someone says, "I know what you're thinking better than you." Or, "I know what you're feeling better than you."

Going along with this dynamic means gradually surrendering your identity to the other person. This is how you wake up one day and find out you're in a relationship with someone who has taken over your life.

I am a huge fan of Lisa A. Romano on YouTube. She talks about holding onto yourself. This is the same idea. Sometimes, I enter a relationship, and slowly but surely, I get the real me erased.

If you're with somebody who is toxic, they're effectively going to set up a dynamic where you're not even allowed to be yourself. It was so jarring to see this play out in real life. To finally become aware of it.

Some toxic people feel threatened by their partner's independence and individuality. That's not a healthy person.

If you tell someone what you think... What you feel... and they tell you you're wrong. RUN. If you stay around someone like that for too long, they will start to get a foothold in your mind and shape you into whoever they want you to be.

As it happened, I found myself in a relationship with someone who wanted a servant as a partner.

Be The Boss of Your Life

Being a victor in your life's story entails being The Boss of your life. There are millions of married couples whose spouse dominates. They're not the boss of their own life. They defer to someone else. They live in a dynamic with an unspoken agreement that one person will be subservient to the other.

You'll never get someone to admit this is real. But it's true. Humans are too irrational to see such a cruel quality in themselves. Even if true.

We think we're so rational. We think we know why we do what we do and why we like who we like.

You're fucking wrong. You don't know.

The brain has a remarkable ability to spot familiar patterns. Say you fall in love with someone, and for the first year, everything seems great. But, over time, you start to discover another side of them. They're mean, selfish, controlling, demeaning.

You think about how much you don't like this side of them.

You're mistaken. You do love that side of them. Because they probably remind you of one of your parents. Even if that parent was abusive, neglectful, cold, unstable, or violent.

My friend Joanne jokes that I have a unique talent for attracting the crazies. It's true.

But the good news is, every time you are aware that you're repeating the same pattern... every time you make a different choice, the pattern gets weaker. This is how you change and grow.

Again, this is the kind of work most people will not do, period. People are far less willing to change their old ways than they realize.

As a kid, I was young, innocent, and not stuck in my ways. I looked around at all the adults and saw this—people who were doomed to repeat the same mistakes repeatedly.

I remember promising myself that I would never become like that.

I mostly failed. But lucky for me, I don't have to have a perfect track record to change the course of my life.

Many human beings don't know who they are. They don't know what they think. They don't know what they feel.

Yes. This is a lot of people. Don't laugh. Because I'm sure I'm talking about half the people laughing. People can be out of touch with themselves.

You are a unique person. You came to this world with a particular disposition. You have desires, but you don't know where they come from. They show up and tell you to do this or that.

Those desires are coming from your authentic self. Your true self is someone quite specific.

You should be able to spot people who are like you in the wild if you can't. Why not?

Think About Yourself as a Brand

I've had to do a lot of that lately. I'm super specific.

Being a runner is very specific.

Being a Buddhist — that's very specific.

Being a salsa and bachata dancer... Very specific.

I know who I am. I know what I like. I don't deviate from that.

I spent decades being a fish out of water; it's not funny.

When I finally became a Buddhist, it was such an easy choice because I felt like I'd already been one for a decade; I didn't own it.

My self-worth was on the floor, so sure, I liked Mooji... But I'd never get on a plane and see him. Headphones are fine.

Sometimes, we're with someone who doesn't want us to be who we are fundamentally. That's not a good person to be with. You will always be at odds with that person; they don't respect you.

They're always going to want to try to change you.

My therapist is teaching me how to get people to earn my time. Wow, this is new. I'm struggling, but I'm hanging in there.

You have to decide how much you're worth. You vote with your actions.

But beware, you already decided on your self-worth a long time ago.

You usually can't just decide to start liking yourself spontaneously — start believing in your value.

If this is your issue, you've had it very long.

I think about the old trees that have been alive for a thousand years. There's a ring for every year.

In real life, you are fixed into a particular belief system and operating in the world.

For me, I was groomed to be a chauffeur. My parents certainly did not know this was what they were doing to me...

But that's what happened.

But, knowing this... Understanding this... Accepting this... These are the building blocks of transformation.

I detach from that old identity whenever I know I'm being the chauffeur. I'm learning to tolerate being treated like a chauffeur less and less.

Being The Chauffeur Now Feels Uncomfortable

I don't like it when someone treats me like a chauffeur, but I know I must remedy the situation lest I become the chauffeur forever.

I had a relapse recently, and it was somewhat severe.

I didn't think I could revert to my old self that much. I was starting to get worried that Mike Tyson went away.

I was wrong. Thank God.

But nothing stays static.

I vote in favor of one paradigm and against the other daily.

I get to decide.

It would be best if you stopped abandoning yourself.

It would be best if you put yourself first.

Simply doing that will automatically shift how you see yourself. You don't have to try to think differently.

Be brave.

This process takes courage. It will require you to consistently do things that make you feel very uncomfortable.

And, when you cast your vote in favor of being your higher self, you are going to go through withdrawals.

Every time I set boundaries with the manipulators in my life — in those early days — I became triggered.

I realized that all the rewards I hoped to receive by being a chauffeur weren't being received. My body felt a sense of panic.

I think it's so interesting.

Sometimes, I will decide to do the healthy thing. I will know I made the right choice, but I may still feel guilty for doing it.

I've learned that such a contradiction is a good thing.

That means I'm breaking down the old system.

I may struggle with one battle, but I'm winning the war.

Until next time,

Anton Volney

Dancer, Writer, Buddhist.



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